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Hard to say if the common cause today in the shortgrass country is to find new income, or to stop old outgo. Difficult also to say our business goes in cycles. "Circles" sounds better to me. Future generations are sure to wonder why Great Grandfather put in chicken brooders over his mushroom cellar, or why Granddad lowered those structures to put in chinchilla cages his son had to haul off to stake a pen for exotic game.

Whatever the case, we seem to have a bad habit of repeating ourselves. Two weeks ago, I found myself trailing a string of yearling ewes across the railroad, where we crossed the lambs in 1939. Driving the sheep saves half or better compared to a trucking bill. Handled right, the ewes gain weight instead of shrinking. Takes a little over a day to move them from up on the divide down to the highway.

Once we leave our pasture, we drive the cow outfits until we reach my brother's ranch. The first afternoon was too hot to make much time crossing our closest neighbor. We overnighted in his largest water lot. (Sheep ranchers call water lots that big a "trap.") Morning brought a cold headwind from the north, perfect for driving sheep. Nevertheless, they started off slow until they hit a big batch of molasses blocks my neighbor keeps out for his old cows. All the sugar in those blocks pepped them up like a fix at Baskin Robbins works on city folks.

The two men helping were in a big hurry. Temperatures fell 40 degrees in the night. Fierce winds cut through our jackets and made our eyes water so bad tears streamed down our cheeks. Every time we headed our horses south to warm a bit, 40 mile an hour gusts whipped our chaps forward and chilled our hind legs around the gap between our pants legs and boot tops. But I knew every bite of these complimentary blocks was pumping life in those woolies. I was right, too. Fueled by the sugar, we had to hold the lead sheep back.

On purpose, we skirted an outfit running emus and guard donkeys. With the sheep so full of energy, we didn't need a long-legged bird or a longeared jack flushing the herd or upsetting the horses. Our old ponies were pretty fresh to have stood in the pen all night without anything to eat except dull looking oats, half ruined by rats and weevils, that we scooped off our host's barn floor. But as we came off the hill overlooking the outfit, a stampede began across the fence. I was unable to tell if the burros were trying to outrun the emus, or trying to protect them from an attack from the rear.

The next critical place was crossing the railroad right-of-way through the wire gap offsetting a cattle guard the wrong way, aiming at a narrow gate on the far side of a public road. We didn't have an extra man to flag traffic. Engineers on the Southern Orient railroad blow their whistles at every crossing and the oil transport drivers press harder on their air horns at all trestles. Trains are

small these days, yet on a downgrade, a sheep moving two miles an hour needs a 43 mile an hour handicap to outrun a freight train or dodge an oil transport.

Johnny Wales, who passes a lot of Brangus cattle across the highway up on the Middle Concho River, says the way he crosses black humpy cows is to close the gate on the other side of the lane so they can only run off in two directions, instead of three. Cow brutes coming out of brushy river bottoms are known as "far horizon cattle," as the last time they are seen once they spook from the asphalt and diesel trucks is passing over the far horizon.

Goat Whiskers the Younger, in the days of his big steer operation, used to free range his cattle on "Santa Fe grass." By the time those steers watched the train go by within 10 feet of their tails, they grew accustomed to screaming wheel bearings and rattling boxcars. Whiskers, I must add, holds the all time record for intimidating the rail service by once backing trucks across the rails on the siding at Sugg Switch to load cattle from the railroad's pens. Had the westbound freight run early, a new chapter would have been added to the many marvels of the Whiskers saga.

Until they passed over and beyond the hump of the rail bed, we were too low to see which direction the sheep headed. Lure of a few pounds of range cubes and luck, however, shot them right on into the next pasture. Be good

to know the energy content of the molasses blocks. They sure
were a powerful tonic for my yearling ewes ...